

If Bill Minor had bothered to ask ...

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

I could have told my friend Bill Minor, had he bothered to ask, that Gov. Haley Barbour played no role in the award of a contract by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to AshBritt of Pompano Beach, FL. Having done my own independent research, I could have told Bill that the contract was awarded in August 2002, at a time when Haley Barbour was still associated with the Washington, D.C., lobbying firm he founded, Barbour, Griffith and Rogers. But, AshBritt didn't become a client of the lobbying firm until March 2005, more than a year after Haley Barbour, newly elected Governor of Mississippi, had resigned from the firm on Jan. 12, 2004. Bill even misquoted The New York Times when he wrote that "AshBritt, according to the Times, paid \$40,000 in the first half of 2004" to the lobbying firm; the Times' Sept. 26, 2005, story said AshBritt paid the lobbying firm about \$40,000 in the first half of 2005. A year makes a big difference: The Governor wasn't in the firm when AshBritt became a client, and AshBritt wasn't a client when it got the contract.

Here is the timeline, and the facts surrounding AshBritt, its contract with the Army Corps of Engineers, and its relationship with the Washington, D.C., lobbying firm:

- 1) 2001 - Army Corps of Engineers solicits responses to a request for proposal for Disaster Response and Management Services;
- 2) August 2002 – Corps of Engineers awards contract to AshBritt;
- 3) Jan. 12, 2004 - Haley Barbour resigns from Barbour, Griffith and Rogers (BGR);
- 4) Jan. 13, 2004 – Haley Barbour is sworn-in as Governor of Mississippi;
- 5) March 1, 2005 - BGR retained by AshBritt for federal government relations;

6) Aug. 29, 2005 - Hurricane Katrina strikes Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama;

7) September 2005 - AshBritt's contract with the Army Corps of Engineers is activated and company begins debris removal work in Mississippi under the terms of its contract.

So, now having the advantage of these facts, which show that Gov. Haley Barbour had nothing to do with the U.S. government's award of a competitive contract to this Florida company in 2002, I wonder if Bill still believes, as he wrote in a column published Sunday by The Clarion-Ledger and last week by the Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal and other newspapers: "Even here in Mississippi, cronyism reared its ugly face in the multi-million dollar Katrina debris cleanup in the hard-hit Mississippi Gulf Coast and South Mississippi area."

"Cronyism?" Armed with the facts, I don't see how Bill, or anyone else who may have read his column, could believe Gov. Barbour had anything to do with the award of this contract. Bill is welcome to his opinions, but the facts speak for themselves.

First reported by The New York Times, and substantiated by a report to a special Katrina state legislative committee, was that a Florida-based company with political ties to Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour had been given a \$568 million no-bid contract by FEMA for debris removal.

The company, AshBrit Environmental, as The Times first reported, has been a client of the potent Washington lobbying firm Barbour headed until he ran for Mississippi's governorship in 2003.

AshBrit, according to the Times, paid \$40,000 in the first half of 2004 to Barbour, Griffith and Rogers, the Mississippi governor's old lobbying firm, which he had founded after leaving the chairmanship of the Republican National Committee.

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